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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 JEDDAH 000643

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: IIRO SECRETARY-GENERAL TALKS OF SAUDI PROGRAMS AND
EXPANSIONS

REF: A. RIYADH 6927
[1](#)B. RIYADH 6467

Classified By: Acting Consul General CB Toney
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: In a meeting at the headquarters of the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) on September 18, Secretary-General Dr. Adnan Khalil Basha told PolOffs that IIRO headquarters in Jeddah has administrative and budgetary control of all 28 country branches and receives no funding from the SAG, depending instead on donor contributions. Funding is primarily limited to Saudi Arabia. Dr. Adnan admitted to IIRO's inability to control potential extremist lecturers at youth summer camps and said negative public opinion of IIRO and its activities is a pervasive problem. Dr. Adnan, who appeared to speak openly and sincerely about the organization, focused his discussions on IIRO's relief efforts, never addressing allegations of terrorist financing or the recent 1267 designation of the head of IIRO's Eastern Province branch (reftels). END SUMMARY.

Current Operations of IIRO

[1](#)2. (C) IIRO began in 1978 as a non-governmental relief organization working in poor, Islamic countries providing humanitarian assistance, funding mosques and orphanages. IIRO is a centralized organization that is headquartered in Jeddah. All 28 country branches report directly to the Jeddah office. According to Dr. Adnan, headquarters (HQ) controls all budgets, programs, and personnel in countries of operation -- even data entry of individual orphans is done at the HQ level.

[1](#)3. (C) Dr. Adnan stated that IIRO depends entirely on donations to support its personnel and programs, receiving no funding from the SAG. It has 13 offices in Saudi Arabia that are used for fundraising purposes only. This funding is used to support the approximately 200 Saudi staff, as well as approximately 3,000 international staff. Dr. Adnan said that, in some countries, IIRO partners with other non-governmental organizations (NGO), local mosques, and UN agencies, such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and WFP, for logistical and programmatic support. IIRO's programs include disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, health care, literacy projects, scholarships, psychological counseling to trauma victims, Islamic studies, and vocational training.

[1](#)4. (C) Although IIRO claims to be a generic relief organization, over 50 percent of its programming is dedicated to orphans and orphanages. The Head of the

Orphanage Department at IIRO told PolOffs that IIRO currently supports 55,000 individual orphans, mostly through monthly payments, and said there are 92,000 more on a waiting list. IIRO supports 13,000 orphans in Jordan, the largest beneficiary of its orphan support program in the world. (NOTE: IIRO defines orphan as a child under the age of 18 who has lost one or both parents. END NOTE.) Donors, almost entirely from Saudi Arabia, sponsor individual orphans and receive updates every four months -- complete with the orphan's photo, letter, and the child's school record.

15. (C) IIRO began programming in Saudi Arabia in 1998. It currently supports 7,000 orphans throughout the Kingdom with both Saudi and non-Saudi citizenship. The organization also supports well water projects in rural areas, as well as other similar development projects. It provides secondary school and university scholarships to male and female youth who are children of prisoners and of HIV/AIDS patients. The scholarships are generally given for private school tuition and include a wide range of subjects in addition to Islamic studies and Arabic language programs. One year ago, IIRO began working with AIDS patients at King Saud Hospital. Since then, IIRO has issued the previously noted scholarships, paid for medical care, provided financial assistance to the families, and paid for several patients to participate in the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. When asked by PolOff about the draft bill being debated in the Shoura Council regarding privacy for AIDS patients, Dr. Adnan agreed that it is needed because Saudi society tends to stigmatize AIDS victims. He commented that those with "the curse" are in need of assistance from the Saudi community at large. (NOTE: In order to protect AIDS patients' privacy, IIRO identifies its beneficiaries by assigned numbers only. END NOTE.)

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Obstacles Facing IIRO

16. (C) Fundraising is done almost entirely in Saudi Arabia through IIRO's 13 branch offices. The two most popular programs are the construction of mosques in memory of a relative, which costs 30,000 Saudi Riyals (approximately USD 8,000), and "adopting" an orphan, which generally costs 100 Saudi Riyals monthly approximately USD 27). However, Dr. Adnan commented that illiteracy and lack of adequate health care are much more pressing concerns. He stated that Muslims can pray anywhere and do not need a mosque to do so -- feeding a family, he emphasized, is far more important than building a mosque. He said that IIRO has trouble raising adequate funds because it is difficult to convince the Saudi public that there are pressing needs in this country too. Additionally, when IIRO tries to partner with local organizations abroad, they often scoff at the idea of assisting a Saudi organization financially, because of the assumption of a large base of wealthy donors.

17. (C) Negative public relations is also a pervasive problem for IIRO. When questioned about IIRO's work with youth in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Adnan talked about summer camps. He said that the negative media reaction stemming from extremist lectures, such as Sheikh al-Break's lecture this summer, is unfortunate, but that no one can "guarantee 100 percent of the time" that no extremists will enter the camps and attempt to pass their ideologies on to the youth. He added that provisions are made to ensure that IIRO's summer camps are not subject to such lecturers, stating that the local municipalities and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs vet both the programs and the lecturers for all of IIRO's summer camps inside Saudi Arabia (NOTE: Dr. Adnan said that there was no such vetting process occurring in summer camps outside of Saudi Arabia. END NOTE).

Projections for IIRO's Future

¶18. (C) Dr. Adnan suggested that, in ten years, IIRO will most likely be operating in as many, if not more, locations as it does now because of the rapidly increasing populations in Islamic countries. He commented that government corruption in many of these countries, along with a lack of preparedness for this rapid population growth, will likely ensure the need for increased humanitarian assistance in the future. Dr. Adnan also predicted that IIRO's work in Saudi Arabia would continue to expand over the course of the next decade. In addition to population growth, he cited poor health (specifically regarding HIV/AIDS and diabetes), lack of democracy, and increasing numbers of prisoners as reasons for the need to provide continued assistance to Saudi Arabia's poorer communities.

¶19. (C) BIO NOTE: Dr. Adnan spoke excellent English with a slight Arabic accent, but did not indicate where he learned English. He is married and has one son and two daughters. His son is a pediatric doctor in Canada. His middle child is a dentist in Jeddah, and his youngest daughter is a nutrition student at King Abdul Aziz University. Dr. Adnan has been working as the Secretary-General for IIRO for ten years. He said he plans to retire from IIRO next year. Prior to joining IIRO he worked for the Muslim World League as Assistant Secretary-General for Education and Culture for 20 years. END BIO NOTE.

COMMENT

¶10. (S/NF) Although PolOffs were initially greeted with video cameras and tape recorders, this ritual "dog and pony show" almost immediately ceased and a 'normalized' dialogue ensued. Dr. Adnan shared information about the seemingly secular, humanitarian programs of IIRO openly and without making any mention of the recent UN 1267 designation of the director of the Eastern Province branch (reftels).

¶11. (S/NF) At no time was there an discussion about how IIRO sends funds to war-torn countries such as Somalia, where IIRO admittedly does significant programming, or how the funds are monitored to ensure that they are used for food, clothing, education, or shelter and not diverted to other activities. Additionally, Dr. Adnan did not mention

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youth activities, such as summer camps in Saudi Arabia or abroad, until directly questioned.

¶12. (S/NF) IIRO is clearly doing some much-needed charitable work. However, the increased focus on its reform-minded programming, such as AIDS and breast cancer awareness programs, could well be driven by IIRO's need to gain public and private support in the wake of ongoing investigations and the recent 1267 designation of the director of the Eastern Province branch. It seems highly unlikely that its efforts reflect any positive ideological shift. Oddly, the Secretary-General does not believe that his organization should be held responsible for lectures given at its own summer camps. Moreover, it is clear that the IIRO's charitable work is conducted with the intent of spreading its extremely conservative Islamic values. END COMMENT.

TONEY